

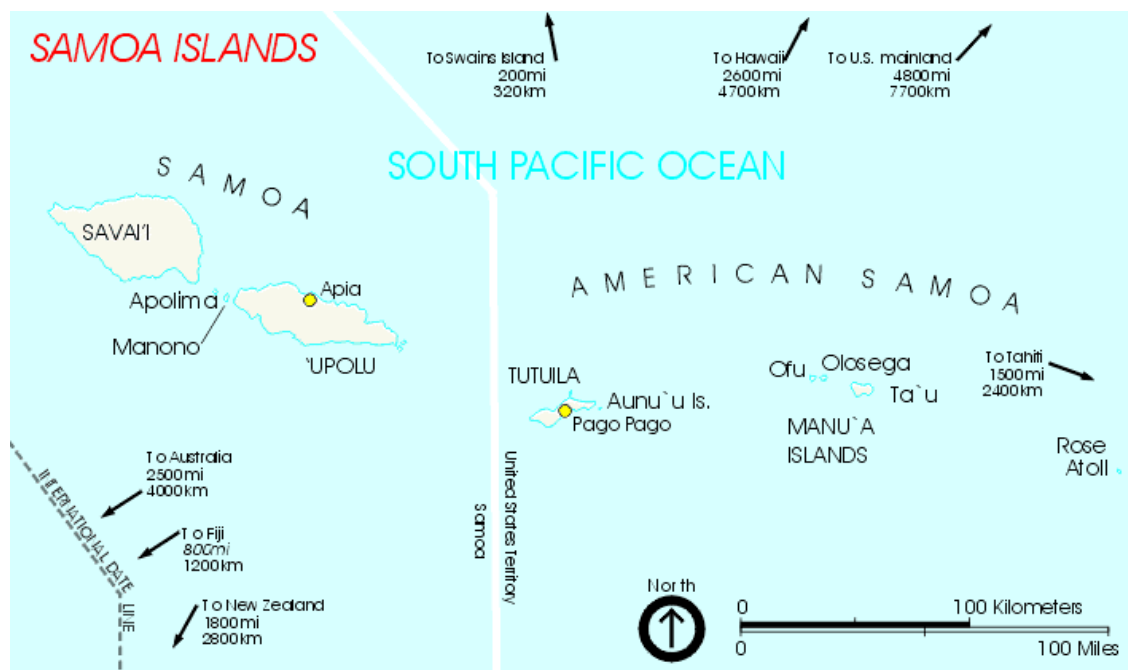
Report

National Park of American Samoa

■ 1.0 Site Description

The National Park of American Samoa (National Park) was authorized in 1988 for the purpose of preserving and protecting the natural and cultural resources while providing for the enjoyment of these resources. This National Park is significant in that it contains the only mixed species paleotropical rainforest in the United States. The National Park is comprised of three widely separated units on the islands of Tutuila, Ta'u, and Ofu in the Territory of American Samoa.

Figure 1. Regional Map



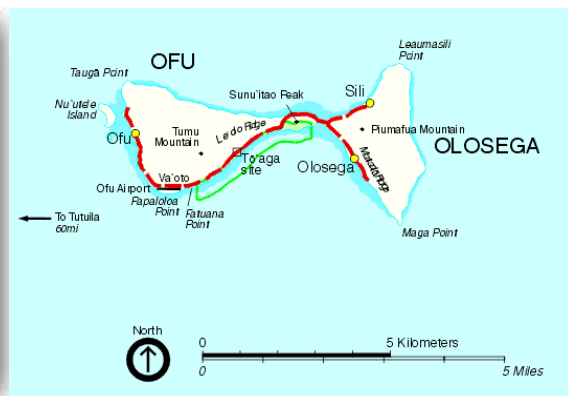
- The Tutuila Unit is located in the north-central portion of the island, between the villages Fagasa on the west and Afono on the east, and comprises approximately 2,500 acres of land and 1,200 acres of offshore waters. Existing facilities within this Unit include a paved road connecting the Villages of Afono and Vatia and trails to the top of Mt. Alava. Facilities proposed in the General Management Plan (GMP) for this Unit include an overlook along the road, an observation platform, three trailheads with parking, and a new hiking trail with scenic overlooks to the top of Mt. Alava.

Figure 2. Tutuila Island Map

- Ta'u Island is located approximately 60 miles east of Tutuila Island. The Ta'u Unit comprises the southern half of the Island and consists of 5,400 acres of land and 1,000 acres of offshore waters. Visitation to this unit is not encouraged. Existing facilities are nonexistent, with the exception of trails that have deteriorated and need to be improved. Future plans for this Unit include development of a home stay program where visitors can stay in villagers' homes, improvement of existing trails, and development of a native village with interpretive displays.

Figure 3. Ta'u Island Map

- Ofu Island is located approximately 10 miles northwest of Ta'u. The Ofu Unit is located along the shoreline from Fatuana Point west to Asaga Strait and is the smallest unit with 70 acres of land and approximately 350 acres of offshore waters. This Unit is known for its beautiful beach and coral reef. Visitor activities include walking along the beach, swimming and snorkeling. Future plans for this Unit primarily include construction of restroom facilities.

Figure 4. Ofu South Shore**Figure 5. Ofu Island Map**

No formal statistics are currently being kept on visitation to the National Park, but in 1994 the American Samoan Governor's Tourism Task Force prepared a report that contained visitor statistics for American Samoa. According to this report, in 1993, less than 5,000 tourists came to American Samoa (excluding the cruise ship passengers, who stay less than eight hours). This number is significantly lower than in 1974 when tourist visits peaked at 35,000 annual tourists. The average length of stay for a tourist is four days. In the report, the National Park is identified as the greatest opportunity to increase tourism on American Samoa.

Typically, visitation to the National Park consists of scenic drives through the Park along the paved road leading to Vatia, observing flying foxes and seabirds, hiking to the top of Mount Alava, walking along the Ofu beach, and snorkeling in the adjacent coral reef. Currently, two to three times more local residents visit the National Park than foreign visitors. These are an estimated 1,200 annual visitors to the National Park, based on the number of persons signing in at the Visitor Center. Visitation is consistent year round, but busiest during weekdays when groups of school children visit the National Park. There is no fee to visit the National Park.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

Regular scheduled airline flights connect the Islands of Tutuila, Ta'u, and Ofu. The Island of Tutuila has a bus system that runs daily (except Sundays) until sunset. Buses originate and terminate at the market in Fagatogo. The buses travel around Pago Pago Harbor and to some remote sections of the island. The buses are modified pickup trucks, uncomfortable for passengers, and do not have consistent schedules.

On the Island of Tutuila, an aerial tramway currently crosses Pago Pago Harbor from Solo Hill adjacent to the Village of Utule to the top of Mount Alava, which is located within the Tutuila Unit. The American Samoa Government's (ASG) Office of Public Information is responsible for the tramway, which has fallen in a state of disrepair and has not been in operation for some time. An U.S. Forest Service tramway engineer prepared an on-site assessment that determined the tramway had deteriorated to the extent that it needed to be replaced by a totally new system.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) needs include replacement of the existing deteriorated aerial tramway system and replacement of the Island buses.

- **Aerial Tramway** – Based on the U.S. Forest Service engineering evaluation, this system requires total replacement due deterioration primarily caused by the use of non-galvanized steel to construct the tramway support systems. The new tramway would follow the same route as the existing system, which runs from Solo Hill adjacent to the Village of Utule to the top of Mount Alava. In addition, access and parking improvements would be made to the Solo Hill terminus of the system along with new restroom, waiting, and visitor interpretation areas. A new interpretive area and restrooms would also be constructed at the upper terminus of the tramway system on Mt. Alava. The GMP projected the construction cost to replace the tramway system to be \$3.5 million, in 1998 dollars. Annual operating costs are projected to be \$112,000. Based on a projected fee to ride the tramway of \$10.00 round trip and \$5.00 one way, the ridership revenues would most likely cover the operating costs, assuming the National Park is able to participate in a fee demonstration program and keep any revenues collected.

- **Bus System** – The “aiga” or “family” buses serving both residents and visitors to Tutuila Island should be replaced with buses that are more modern and comfortable to ride in. Due to the limited availability of rental cars, an adequate bus system is an essential element in providing access to the National Park.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The new tramway system is required primarily to improve access to the National Park. Currently, the National Park is only accessible to visitors in good physical condition. For example, the approximately 5,000 annual cruise ship passengers that visit American Samoa are usually unable to visit the National Park. These passengers are generally older and unable to navigate steep terrain and primitive conditions. The tramway system would provide a means for visitors that are not as physically fit to view the spectacular scenery and natural resources of the Park.

A secondary purpose of the tramway is to provide non-vehicular access to Mt. Alava, where television antennas are located. Currently, maintenance on these television antennas requires driving a vehicle to the top of Mt. Alava. The road is difficult to maintain due to the 200 inches of annual rainfall the Island receives. The vehicles currently used to service these antennas tend to further degrade the road surface. The tramway system would provide non-vehicular access to the antennas.

Replacing the island buses will both enhance the quality of life of residents while improving accessibility for visitors. New buses will provide a better visitor experience without increasing the number of private vehicles on island roadways.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

National Park Service. *General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, National Park of American Samoa*, October 1997.

<http://www.nps.gov/npsa/> (visited November 1, 1999).

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Charles Cranfield, Superintendent, National Park of American Samoa